

Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman

Commissioner Michael J. Copps

Commissioner Robert M. McDowell

Commissioner Mignon Clyburn

Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker

Federal Communications Commission

445 Twelfth Street SW

Washington, DC 20554

Re: CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

Dear Chairman Genachowski and Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn, and Baker,

As an employee of a Video Relay Service (VRS) provider, I have the great fortune of assisting deaf individuals to communicate by videophone in American Sign Language using VRS. I have seen first-hand that this life-altering broadband service is a vital link that connects deaf people to the hearing community.

I have had the honor of interpreting for several life saving phone calls when the deaf consumer using VRS in a life threatening situation is able to access 911 and as a result of VRS was able to obtain medical care in a speedy and accurate manner (ADA) which other wise would not have occurred with TTY communication as the person was barely able to sign their health concern much less type it on a tty. Please consider if this was your family member would you feel that they deserve equal access to life saving 911 using VRS as you have as a hearing consumer using 911? Please do not discriminate against the Deaf community as they have endured such discrimination and isolation for years please consider equal access when you are considering these rates. In many cases VRS is a lifeline for

many of these Deaf people. It is used for suicide prevention hotlines...imagine if it were not available. It has helped to connect many family members who for years were unable to have a true conversation with a loved one due to the communication barrier.. bridging families together. These are just basic needs of ALL humans.

Ensuring that deaf individuals have access to VRS and encouraging improvements in VRS should be a high priority for you as Chairman and Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the FCC to make available to all deaf individuals nationwide "functionally-equivalent" communications.

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You will soon determine the future of VRS. When you set the VRS rate, you will determine whether America makes progress toward the statutory goals of functional equivalence, nationwide access and inclusion "or force deaf users to revert to TTY communications creating barriers once again in families, life threatening situations (911 and suicide lines) a major step back. And, you will determine whether VRS fulfills its potential to drive broadband adoption by the deaf, even in the face of poverty and isolation.

I was deeply disturbed to see the Commission's recent Public Notice on VRS rates. These proposals would put an end to VRS as we know it. My employer has already informed me that if these proposed rates are adopted, our company would head into bankruptcy. This would be disastrous for deaf VRS users.

The FCC should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. You should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and continues to improve services levels. Recent developments in VRS are a good example of how the service can be improved, such as enhanced 911 services, 10-digit numbering, a larger and better-trained pool of interpreters and better videophones with an array of enhanced features. Monthly payments for broadband are a big expense for many deaf people, and instead of trying to cut back on VRS, you should be exploring ways to make VRS over broadband more affordable to deaf individuals.

Even though they are living in poverty many Deaf choose to have the connection, safety and security of family, 911 and just the ability to connect on a basic human level with other people.

Progress towards functional equivalence will be destroyed if the FCC does not encourage VRS providers to improve VRS and make it more widely available. VRS is a recent and dramatic advancement that benefits those who are deaf, but so much more can be done. It would be tragic if the FCC were to destroy this broadband service that is so vital to the deaf.

Recent reports of fraud in the VRS industry are disturbing to employees who work for a company that has operated within current FCC guidelines and has worked to maintain the integrity of the VRS fund. The FCC must devote more of its time and energy to focusing on the elimination of fraud. Please know we going to work and providing an honest service for our consumers.

I urge you to establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that will encourage VRS providers to invest in improving VRS and reaching more deaf individuals. The law requires it and it is the right thing to do.

Consider for a moment the times in your life when you needed a personal connection, a life saving event occurred with you or your family that saved a life.. NOW imagine if communication was a barrier in those situations that resulted in a life being lost.... this truly is a life and death decision for the Deaf Consumers.

The rates for VRS proposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in its April 30 Public Notice would be a disaster for VRS because “

- The rates are so low that it would be the end of VRS as we know it today. No provider would seek to provide VRS at the low rates proposed by the FCC;
- The FCC proposes a low interim VRS rate. A better option would be a multi-year VRS rate, which would allow VRS providers to continue to invest in their offerings for the deaf.
- VRS and the improvements made to it over the years have moved us closer to the goal of “function equivalence” mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The FCC rate proposal would destroy that progress and move us further from achieving the goals of the ADA;

- My employer has informed me that this rate proposal would lead our company into bankruptcy, leaving our deaf customers without the vital VRS service they have come to expect;

- This proposal would almost certainly mean that my job and countless others would be in jeopardy in an economy where finding a new job would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. This is life changing. Please consider the whole affects of your decision.

Thank you for your consideration,

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